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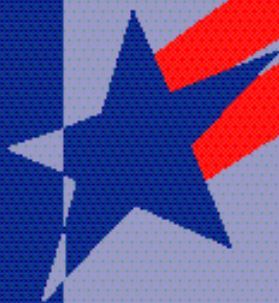
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SPECIAL REPORT

The Senate Democratic Alternative Education Bill

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The Senate Democratic Alternative Education Bill

The role of national education policy should be to target scarce public tax dollars to areas of national need; work in partnership with schools and States to raise academic achievement for all children; and help establish a system that holds all schools accountable for children's academic progress.

The Senate Democratic alternative to **S. 2**, the *Educational Opportunities Act*, is built on several key principles. Senate Democrats are focused on fundamental changes that make a difference by:

- setting high standards for all children;
- guaranteeing funds for targeted national priorities that have been proven to make a difference, like lower class size, modern schools, and improved uses of technology;
- strengthening accountability for States, school districts and schools;
- increasing funding to help low-performing schools improve student performance;
- promoting greater use of after-school programs and summer school to help students achieve high academic standards;
- ensuring that Title I resources go to highest-poverty school districts and schools;
- attracting quality teachers and promoting quality teaching;
- making schools safe and improving discipline; and
- ensuring that parents have a strong role in schools.

Demanding Accountability

In 1994, Congress reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* which required States to set challenging and rigorous standards and align their curriculum and assessments to these standards. In 2000, we must take the next step: holding States accountable for increasing student performance and increasing achievement for the most disadvantaged children.

The Democratic alternative creates a tough new accountability system that demands measurable progress each school year and provides consequences for failing schools.

The Democratic bill:

- holds schools accountable for increased student performance by requiring schools to ensure that all students meet or exceed State proficiency standards within ten years;
- provides significant consequences for failure. States and school districts would be required to take urgent action to turn around failing schools — like changing the governance structure of the school (by creating a charter school, changing the staff and administration, or closing the school); providing intensive professional development; and providing comprehensive technical assistance. States would lose their option to take advantage of programs like Ed-Flex and administrative funds if they continuously fail to improve;
- prevents masking the achievement gap by adding a requirement that States, school districts and schools judge academic progress using disaggregated student performance data — by race, limited English proficiency, and poverty status — in determining adequate yearly progress;
- requires schools to notify parents when a school is low-performing, to use research-based strategies to improve, and make results public;
- enhances the quality of teachers by requiring schools needing improvement to spend at least ten percent of their Title I funds on professional development;

- commits additional resources to low-performing schools by increasing the State set-aside for turning around these schools;
- allows local school districts to permit students in schools scheduled for corrective action to transfer to higher-performing public schools which are not in need of improvement, but limits the amount of Title I funds that may be used for transportation;
- ensures that States have an accountability system for all schools that will lead to every student meeting or exceeding State proficiency standards within ten years;
- holds school districts and schools accountable for student achievement in reading and math and in other subjects that the State chooses; and
- requires States to identify schools and local school districts for improvement or corrective action based on failure to make yearly progress, intervene in those schools, and implement corrective action no later than three years after first identifying the agency or school.

The Democratic alternative would also ensure accountability in Federal education programs that are funded through competitive grants. It would require States and school districts receiving competitive grant funding to develop a plan with annual performance goals.

Placing a Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom

Teacher quality is a critically important factor in student achievement. Research shows that many new teachers are underqualified; poor and minority students are often taught by the least qualified teachers; and better-prepared teachers stay longer.

As a result of increasing enrollments, teacher turnover, and retirements of veteran teachers, public schools in the United States will have to hire more than two million new teachers over the next ten years. The need for new teachers in 1998 was met by admitting 50,000 unqualified teachers into the classroom.

The Democratic alternative provides \$2 billion to help schools recruit and train high quality teachers and includes accountability provisions to make sure all teachers are fully qualified. States must have a qualified teacher in every classroom by the fourth year after enactment of the bill. The Democratic alternative would guarantee that communities receive substantial funds to recruit qualified teachers; provide qualified mentors for new teachers; provide professional development for new teachers; and hold schools accountable for results.

The Democratic plan would give the Secretary of Education authority to support activities to meet urgent teacher shortages through national recruitment activities like the Transition to Teaching and Hometown Teachers Program, establishment of a national Job Bank, and continuation of the Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education.

The Democratic alternative also would help school principals and superintendents by improving and expanding professional development opportunities for principals and superintendents.

Guaranteeing Help for Disadvantaged Children

Democrats believe that we need to do all we can to target resources to the neediest communities, so that the most disadvantaged students receive a good education. The Democratic alternative does not include programs that would take away this kind of targeting — Republican block grants like the “Straight A’s” and Teacher Empowerment block grants and portability grants — and keeps current guarantees in the law that Title I funds go to the most needy and poor students.

Committing to National Education Priorities

The reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* gives us an opportunity to build on recent progress and invest in programs that we know will bring about change. Parents and educators know from experience that the common sense initiatives supported by Democratic Senators work — smaller classes; better teachers; more parental involvement; safer modern schools; and expanded and improved education technology.

Democrats believe that we should require States, school districts and schools that spend Federal funds for education to use strategies that have proven effective — no fancy schemes or risky ventures, just programs with a proven track record of success.

The Democratic alternative guarantees Federal funding for additional targeted, national priorities that have been proven to make a difference:

- guaranteeing high-quality after-school programs for more students. The Democratic alternative would build 6,000 new centers, giving 1.6 million school age children access to before- and after-school and summer programs in safe, drug-free environments;
- recruiting, hiring and training teachers to reduce class size in grades one through three to a national average of 18 students to enhance student achievement;
- repairing schools so that 14 million students now in inadequate buildings can learn in a safe, healthy environment;
- strengthening public school choice programs, including a new grant program to implement new approaches to provide families more options; and
- guaranteeing technology programs, including Star Schools, that train teachers to use technology effectively in instruction, ensure that all teachers and students have modern computers in their classrooms, connect every classroom to the Internet, and integrate high-quality software and on-line learning resources into every school's curriculum.

Expanding the Role of Parents

Senate Democrats are committed to helping ensure that States, school districts and schools involve parents in the education of America's children. Research shows that parental involvement in a child's education improves student achievement, promotes self-esteem, and decreases unhealthy activity like violence and drug use.

Current law, however, does not sufficiently encourage parental involve-

ment or ensure that school doors are open to parents. Although there is agreement on the importance of parental involvement, efforts to meaningfully involve parents often fall short because of lack of teacher training and time.

The Democratic amendment would provide an expanded role for parents by:

- establishing report cards to inform parents of the quality of their schools and their progress in meeting student achievement goals;
- providing parents with the right to know about their child's teachers' qualifications;
- requiring States and school districts that receive Title I funds to review the effectiveness of activities carried out by schools involving parental involvement;
- requiring States to provide a description of how parental involvement practices will be implemented and evaluated when they submit consolidated applications or other State plans; and
- requiring States to provide public notice of parental involvement policies in a manner and language understandable to parents, and provide the opportunity for parents and others to comment on these policies.

Conclusion

The Democratic alternative strengthens Title I to make schools more accountable for the academic success of *all* children; makes sure children in Title I schools are taught by qualified teachers; and ensures that States and school districts do all they can to turn around failing schools by using proven effective strategies for reform. In short, the Democratic alternative guarantees that we fund programs that work — for all children.